

## **WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

### **COMMITTEE: HUMAN SERVICES (VETERANS' SERVICES)**

**DATE: SEPTEMBER 21, 2009**

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<b>COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:</b>	<b>OTHERS PRESENT:</b>
SUPERVISORS SIMMES	DENISE DiRESTA, DIRECTOR, VETERANS' SERVICES
BENTLEY	FREDERICK MONROE, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD
STEC	HAL PAYNE, COMMISSIONER OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND FISCAL SERVICES
TAYLOR	
<b>COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:</b>	JOANN MCKINSTRY, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND FISCAL SERVICES
SUPERVISORS GIRARD	JOAN SADY, CLERK OF THE BOARD
VANNESS	SUPERVISOR SHEEHAN
SOKOL	REPRESENTING THE NEW YORK STATE DIVISION OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS:
	BILL BRENNAN, LEGAL CONSULTANT
	HARRY CANDEE, STATE COUNSELOR
	TOM LYNCH, RECORDS MANAGER
	CHRIS LAFOUNTAIN, ANALYST PROGRAMMER
	SARAH MCLENITHAN, LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

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Mrs. Simmes called the meeting of the Human Services Committee to order at 1:30 p.m.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Denise DiResta, Director of Veterans' Services, who announced that Bill Brennan, Legal Consultant for the New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs, and Harry Candee, State Counselor for the New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs, were in attendance to provide a presentation on the proposed Vet Cop database. She explained that this would be the first of two presentations on prospective database administrators her Office was considering for records management.

Mr. Stec entered the meeting at 1:33 p.m.

Mr. Brennan apprised that there were two different versions of the Vet Cop Program, the first of which was the Stand Alone version that allowed for each individual Office to populate the server. The other version of the program available, Mr. Brennan advised, was Vet Cop Platform, which was a server based network that the New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs was connected to.

Mr. Brennan stated that the New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs had developed the Vet Cop Platform to create a seamless network of Veterans' benefits counseling throughout the State. He explained that the benefit of the system was that if a Veteran moved from one County to another within New York State, their information would be accessible to the Counselor through the Vet Cop System.

Mr. Candee reviewed and explained the merits of the web based Vet Cop Program. Mr. Brennan

pointed out that the system would drastically reduce the amount of paper records that were required to be stored. Tom Lynch, Records Manager, queried how long the records would be retained on the system and Mr. Brennan replied that the records could be retained for as long as the New York State Archives records retention schedule required; however, he said, in some cases records would remain on the system indefinitely. Mr. Lynch asked who maintained the Platform and Mr. Brennan responded that it was the New York State Office of General Services.

Mr. Lynch questioned if the system would eliminate the need for paper documents and Mr. Brennan replied that currently the Veterans' Affairs (VA) did not allow for electronic filing; however, he stated, the VA was requiring that electronic filing be instituted in all States by 2012. He noted that New York State would be the first State in the Nation to commence electronic filing of VA records.

Ms. DiResta asked if the Stand Alone System was using Microsoft Access 97 as the operating system and Mr. Brennan responded that he was unsure; however, he stated, he would look into this and report back to Ms. DiResta. She advised that her concern with Microsoft Access 97 was that the Information Technology (IT) Department had informed her that as of July 2010 Microsoft would no longer be supporting that version of the program.

Ms. DiResta questioned if the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) credentials were allowed access to the program and Mr. Brennan replied in the negative. Mr. Brennan apprised that to access the Vet Cop system it was necessary to be accredited through New York State and that the Veteran must declare the State their Power of Attorney (POA). Ms. DiResta pointed out that she was not accredited through the State; therefore, she was not authorized to use the system. Mr. Brennan advised that the New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs would provide the necessary training for her to become accredited with the State at no cost to the County.

Mr. Candee interjected that a Veteran with the VFW or the American Legion listed as their POA could be entered into the system if they signed a form changing their POA to the State; however, he said, if they were not agreeable to this, a paper claim could be filed. Mr. Brennan suggested Ms. DiResta distribute a letter to Veterans explaining that it would be necessary for their POA to be with the State to file electronic claims; however, the letter should note that if they did not change their POA to the State, she would still be able to assist them with paper claims.

Ms. DiResta asked what would happen to the files in her Office if she were to lose her accreditation with the State and Mr. Brennan responded that it would be necessary to change the POA from the State to the VFW or the American Legion.

Ms. DiResta questioned if the 51% quota remained in place and Mr. Brennan replied affirmatively. He explained that to create the seamless system that was accessible throughout the State, it was necessary to populate the system with more than half of the Veterans served.

Ms. DiResta queried whether the system was continuously updated to provide the latest information from the VA and Mr. Brennan replied affirmatively. She asked where the server for the program

would be and Mr. Brennan responded that if you used the Stand Alone System the server would be located on the main server for Warren County; however, he said, the Vet Cop Platform server was located in Albany.

Mrs. Simmes questioned what the cost to the County would be and Mr. Brennan replied that the only cost to the County would be for the hardware. Mr. Bentley queried how Ms. DiResta could be accredited through the State to use the program and Mr. Brennan responded that Ms. DiResta would have to sign up for a training course. He said that subsequent to Ms. DiResta completing the training course it was necessary for Warren County to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs for the program to be instituted within Warren County.

Mr. Bentley asked if a resolution was necessary to commence the process for Ms. DiResta to become eligible to use the Vet Cop System and Ms. DiResta replied that prior to making any decisions she would like to schedule another meeting to review another database system.

Mr. Stec questioned what happened if the 51% quota was not reached and Mr. Brennan responded that it would be necessary for his Office to make a determination, because if the quota was not reached the County would be in breach of the MOU. Mr. Taylor asked if the site was secure and Mr. Brennan responded affirmatively.

Ms. DiResta asked if an awards history was available within the system and Mr. Brennan replied affirmatively. Mr. Brennan stated that the program allowed for reports to be administered such as the awards history of a particular Veteran.

Mrs. Simmes queried what the cost of the alternative program was and Ms. DiResta replied that the cost was \$1,450 for an eighteen month time frame, which, she noted, she had included in her Budget. Mrs. Simmes questioned what the name of the program was and Ms. DiResta responded that the name of the program was Veterans Information Management System (VIMS). Mr. Taylor asked Ms. DiResta what hardware would need to be purchased in order to use the Vet Cop System and Ms. DiResta replied that a scanner was necessary.

Ms. DiResta asked for clarification if any Counties had opted not to continue utilizing the Vet Cop System and Mr. Brennan replied in the negative. Mr. Brennan explained that every County that the Division of Veterans Affairs had an MOU with was currently using the system or was in the process of implementing the system.

Mr. Brennan advised that if Warren County determined that they would like to use the Stand Alone System, it would be necessary to have a copyright license signed. Ms. DiResta asked if the Stand Alone System provided updates and technical support and Mr. Brennan responded in the negative.

Mrs. Simmes questioned why Ms. DiResta was considering using a different program when the Vet Cop Program had no cost to the County and Ms. DiResta replied that because the majority of the Veterans' she assisted listed the VFW or the American Legion as their POA; therefore, she explained, she would be unable to change their POA on existing claims to the State. Mr. Brennan pointed out that this was not the case, as she would be able to make the necessary changes until the

claim reached the Notice of Disagreement status. She asked if changing the POA would delay the claim and Mr. Brennan replied in the negative.

Ms. DiResta apprised that her only other concern with the system was that she would lose all the records entered if the State decided to discontinue the program. Mr. Brennan stated that it was unlikely the State would discontinue the program; however, he said, if that did occur Ms. DiResta could advise the Veterans served by her Office that they would need to change their POA from the State to the American Legion or the VFW if they wanted her Office to access their records.

Hal Payne, Commissioner of Administrative and Fiscal Services, advised that it was necessary to address records storage. He stated that a determination needed to be made as to the length of time that records were retained, as the Veterans' Office would be moving to a new location and there would be less space available for records storage. Mr. Brennan apprised that it would be necessary for the New York State Archives Office to review what types of records the Veterans' Office contained so they could develop a retention schedule for those records.

Mr. Brennan apprised that if Warren County signed an MOU with his Office they would supply a copy of their record retention schedule if the New York State Archives Office would not supply one to Warren County. Mr. Lynch apprised that the only difference between the State record retention schedule and the local schedule was that the local one required records be retained for six years and the State required that records be retained for ten years.

Mr. Lynch asked who owned the existing records and Mr. Brennan responded that the current records were the property of Warren County. Ms. DiResta questioned who archived the electronically filed documents and Mr. Brennan replied that his Office did.

Mrs. Simmes noted that Ms. DiResta had to review all the files in her Office to determine what should be kept and Ms. DiResta replied that she was not sure if she had the resources available to complete that work. Mrs. Simmes advised that the proposed elimination of the Senior Account Clerk in the Veterans' Services Office had not been confirmed and that person could be directed to assist Ms. DiResta in reviewing the files for the time being. Mr. Candee suggested that files, such as DD-214 and birth certificates be retained, as it may be necessary to access them for future claims.

Mrs. Simmes asked Ms. DiResta when she intended to present the other alternative for database administration and Ms. DiResta said she would schedule the meeting at the Committee's discretion.

As there was no further business to come before the Human Services Committee, on motion made by Mr. Stec and seconded by Mr. Bentley, Mrs. Simmes adjourned the meeting at 2:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah McLenithan, Legislative Office Specialist